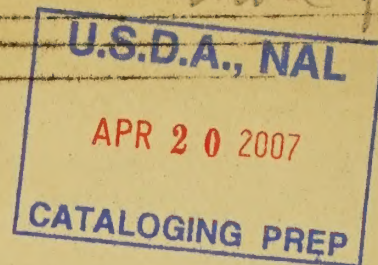


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HELPING ALABAMA'S NEEDY FARMERS TOWARD SECURITY

AN OUTLINE OF THE PROGRAM
TO ASSIST
TENANTS, SHARECROPPERS AND OTHER LOW-INCOME RURAL FAMILIES
TO BECOME
SELF-SUPPORTING AND INDEPENDENT

UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
FARM SECURITY ADMINISTRATION

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AUBURN

ALABAMA

WHY HELP IS NEEDED

The annual income of Southern farmers is the lowest of any group in the country. At the bottom of that group are the landless tenants.

When the depression was at its worst over a million American farm families were in urgent need of relief. In the South--where tenancy is most widespread--soil erosion, years of ruinous crop prices, faulty farming and credit practices, unsound tenure systems and burdensome debt were factors explaining the destitution to which thousands were reduced.

In Alabama the 1935 census showed 64.5 per cent of all farmers were tenants or sharecroppers. Considering conditions, it was not especially surprising to learn possessions of some 13,000 rural families transferred then from relief rolls to what is now the Farm Security Administration averaged but \$3.03 per family. Their average cash farm income had been only \$91 per family for the previous year, or \$15 per person. They lacked livestock, farming tools, food, feed, and adequate household equipment. The shacks in which they lived ranked with the worst city slums. Their diet was mainly bread, "fatback" bacon and syrup---with pellagra and other deficiency diseases resulting. A heavy toll was taken through illness and death due to lack of medical care and sanitation. With no credit and virtually no assets they were at the bottom of the ladder economically, in body and in spirit.

HOW HELP IS GIVEN

Needs of such families are many and varied. The Farm Security Administration has the task of doing what is necessary for their rehabilitation, making it possible for them and others like them to get a new start.

Rehabilitation involves far more than lending money. With the moderate loans go technical help and advice on management of farm and home. Such aid enables these low-income farmers, who cannot get credit from any other source, to make the most of the opportunity to become self-supporting and independent.

A balanced farming program to meet each family's needs is worked out with the cooperation of FSA supervisors, who are trained in modern farm and home management. The families are visited, the year's work planned and particular problems--such as, providing ways and means for all children to attend school, and making it possible for the family to get necessary medical attention--are faced as they arise.

Aside from basic rehabilitation activities, various other steps are taken to improve the lot of the rural needy. Loans are made to a limited number of deserving tenants, sharecroppers and farm laborers to purchase family-size farms. Those overburdened with debt may receive help in effecting adjustments satisfactory to the creditor. Loans are made to

groups of low-income farmers for heavy farm machinery, pure-bred sires or other needs individuals cannot meet. Resettlement or homestead projects of various types have been established to provide security for needy farm families on good land.

PROGRESS MADE

Records reveal outstanding progress has been made by needy families of rural Alabama since they started farming under the rehabilitation program of the Farm Security Administration. Although no figures can be given to show gains in health, knowledge and other important factors, the net worth of families aided jumped from the low average of \$3.03 in 1935 to \$317.07 in 1936, \$362.00 in 1937, and \$442.15 at the end of 1938.

There is a reason for this economic advance, made at a time when unfavorable conditions handicapped agriculture generally. It is the result of reasonable credit, plus better planning and improved methods. Each farmer follows a farm and home plan drawn according to his own needs. Through FSA supervision he benefits in being guided along lines tested and proven by agricultural experts. By such means he is better prepared to push on toward security and independence.

A total of 31,861 of the 273,773 farm families of the state were receiving FSA assistance on June 30, 1939. This number includes some on the original 1935 list not yet rehabilitated, as well as others added in years since. A survey embracing a representative group of 11,791 of these families, averaging 6.2 persons, based on figures taken from files of supervisors in the various counties, discloses in detail how this advance has been brought about.

REPAYMENT OF LOANS

As rehabilitation families become more self-supporting, the loan average falls. By producing food and feed needed for home use, they have more of their cash income available for purchase of farm and home necessities and to repay loans from the Farm Security Administration.

Rural rehabilitation loans in Alabama since the program was started in 1935 up to July 31, 1939, totalled \$14,540,224.10. As the money was advanced for immediate needs, it went almost at once into local channels of trade, bringing new business to many and varied companies. These loans averaged \$253.36 per family during the fiscal year from June 30, 1936, to June 30, 1937. The average during the year ending June 30, 1938, was \$186.87. An increase of 107.5 per cent was made during the 1938-39 fiscal year in the number of families assisted and the more extensive needs of the new ones figured in raising the loans to an average of \$300.69. In that year, also, a change was made in the general lending plan, with the new loans being based on a five-year period. Under this plan the borrower agrees to deposit in the bank the amount of operating capital at the end of the year for use again the next year, and to pay one-fifth of the total

loan each year, representing payment for necessary livestock, tools, and other equipment of long-range value.

BETTER LIVING

A better living is being made by rehabilitation families and their future has been brightened. Provided with livestock, tools and other necessities through loans they could not otherwise get, together with friendly advice, they have developed higher standards while adding to their subsistence and income.

Production of food and feed to meet the needs of family and livestock is a fundamental part of the FSA program. As this is accomplished correspondingly less of the cash income is required for current expenses while more of it may be used to repay loans, add to household equipment and otherwise improve living conditions. Failure to do this while taking a one-crop risk largely explains the near-destitution to which they had fallen

GARDENS AND CANNING

A fenced, year-round garden of adequate size is one of the requirements to be met by those receiving rehabilitation loans. Previously, few had such gardens and in consequence health had suffered from ill-balanced diets. In addition to supplying fresh vegetables of many varieties, the surplus is preserved so wintertime meals may be balanced and wholesome. In 1938 first-year families averaged canning 181 quarts of fruits and vegetables, an increase of 106 over the total for the year prior to acceptance on the program. Second and third-year families showed an increase of 174 quarts per family in 1938 over what they canned in the year before acceptance, when they averaged just one quart.

Encouraged and aided directly by FSA home management supervisors, it is not rare that housewives preserve as many as three dozen varieties of fruits and vegetables and an increasing number are canning meat. To start a family on the road to adequate food preservation, provision is made in loans for purchase of sufficient jars and a pressure cooker that serves both as a small canning plant and utensil for preparation of wholesome meals. 58.3 per cent of the Alabama rehabilitation families have cookers.

MEAT AND MILK

Formerly too much of the income of these families went for the purchase of meat and still they had little. Lack of sufficient milk had been one of the main handicaps, especially for children. Practically none of these families had adequate food of this kind but notable gains have been made. In 1938 the Alabama rehabilitation families had an average of 1.6 subsistence cattle, 3.2 hogs, and 28 chickens. They had an average of 318 pounds more meat, 278 more gallons of milk and 60 dozen more eggs for

home use, representing a large margin of difference in their previous condition. In 1935 only 47.5 per cent had any cows, only 61 per cent had hogs, and 79.1 per cent had chickens. In virtually no case were subsistence needs being adequately and wholesomely met at that time.

MORE FOOD - FEED ACREAGE

Low-income farmers being assisted by the Farm Security Administration are cooperating with the AAA program in the same way as all other farmers in the state, and the progress shown had been made without increasing cotton acreage. However, acreage in feed and food crops has been greatly increased.

As problems of individual families are studied, it is often found they do not have sufficient land, or land capable of successful farming. Loans are not made by the FSA until the applicant secures sufficient acreage on which his particular rehabilitation program may be based. Otherwise he would be foredoomed to failure and repayment of the loan would be rendered impossible.

All of the Alabama rehabilitation borrowers at the end of 1938 showed an average increase in acres operated of 21 over what they had before acceptance on the program. It is a notable coincidence that the acreage devoted to production for farm and home use averaged 21 also. An average of 9 acres was planted to cash crops.

LONGER LEASES---BETTER SOIL

With approximately two-thirds of all Alabama farmers being tenants, the matter of tenure is important. The Farm Security Administration is definitely interested in tenure arrangements as they may advance or retard efforts to get needy farm families on a self-sustaining basis. In addition to the tenant, the landlord and public are concerned, along with the FSA, with improving a system contributing to dissipation of the soil through misuse, neglect and erosion.

Results are becoming clearly evident. Families receiving rehabilitation loans are now required to have a satisfactory written lease. In Alabama last year 99 per cent had written leases and 41 per cent were for more than one year, in contrast to the verbal one-year leases formerly prevailing. Ninety-seven per cent of those farming for the first time under FSA guidance in 1938 had written leases, whereas only 13 per cent had them in 1937. 34 per cent of these first-year farmers had written leases for more than one year, compared with 2 per cent the previous year.

Census surveys show that two out of every three tenant farmers in Alabama move to a different place each year. Such families naturally take as much as possible from the land and pay scant attention to soil improvement, fence and building repairs, or other constructive, long-

range activities. In the fall of 1935 only 2.7 per cent of the rehabilitation families of the state helped to rebuild the soil by planting winter cover crops. Over 30 per cent did so in the fall of 1937 and in 1938 the average of all borrowers was three acres, with first-year families trebling their acreage in such crops. Only 24 per cent changed farms during the year and first-year families showed a 14 per cent improvement during 1938 in this respect.

MORE, BETTER WORK ANIMALS

Over one-fourth of the rehabilitation borrowers in the state advanced last year from the status of sharecropper to tenant. This was made possible largely by enabling them to secure work animals needed for successful farming.

Pride is taken in owning their own horses and mules, with morale being boosted accordingly. Also, adequate workstock enables them to carry out a complete farming program, providing for crop rotation and make more effective use of available labor.

In 1935 not only was the quality of work animals low and the number inadequate, but 87 per cent of all Alabama rehabilitation families had to depend on steers. By 1937 the percentage of steers had been reduced to 18.63 and 81.37 per cent of workstock was mules or mares. In 1938 those having mules or mares represented 99 per cent and at the end of that year the average increase over what they had before coming on the program was almost one work animal to the family.

COOPERATION

Farmers operating under the FSA program are encouraged to take part in various activities involving the welfare of the community, as well as the farming population in general. At the end of 1938 reports from all county supervisors of the state showed 98 per cent were participating in the AAA program. Twenty-nine per cent were cooperating with the Soil Conservation Service and 31 per cent were practicing definite erosion control.

MORE CHILDREN IN SCHOOL

As tenant and sharecropper families become more secure, it is possible for their children to make a better record of school attendance. The FSA found many boys and girls had not attended for various reasons. Lack of suitable clothing, adequate lunches or the necessity of staying at home to help in eking out an existence for the family were some of the explanations. As farm and home plans were drawn, providing for well-rounded, more business-like operations, resulting in increased income, attendance has spurted. In 1938 children of FSA families in Alabama had a record of 95.7,

as compared with enrollment for the state as a whole for the same period of 75.8 per cent, according to A. H. Collins, state superintendent of education.

BETTER HOUSING

According to estimates based on a survey in 1934 under direction of the Bureau of Home Economics, it would cost about \$8,500,000,000 to put the farm homes of the United States in good repair if all materials were purchased and all labor hired at prevailing wage rates.

The survey shows housing conditions in the South to be much worse than in any other section of the country. In Alabama 88.4 per cent of the farm houses are inadequately screened, 95.5 per cent have inadequate paint, 99.1 per cent have no indoor toilets, 97.8 per cent have no water piped in house and 97.2 per cent have no bathrooms.

In seeking to remedy this situation as far as possible, the Farm Security Administration has set up minimum standards for houses and other construction on tenant-purchase farms and generally emphasizes better housing as one of the most pressing needs for low-income families. The standards in tenant-purchase construction, which are given in plans for low-cost rural building available to other farmers, are as follows:

"Window and doors should be in good repair and properly screened; sanitary privies or toilets designed to meet the acceptable standards of the state health departments shall be provided; the water supply shall be adequate for family and livestock needs; the water for domestic use shall be tested by a qualified public agency, protected against contamination by drainage from privies, surface run-off or otherwise; foundations must be adequate and sound, and floors in good condition; roofs must be water-tight and exterior walls protected by paint or other wood preservative; chimneys must be in such state of repair that they do not constitute fire hazards; sleeping quarters should be adequate to meet family needs; there should be adequate provision for storing food, clothing, utensils, tools, produce, and so forth; there should be adequate shelter for poultry and livestock; no attempt should be made to repair buildings that are in such condition that they should be demolished and replaced by new structures."

HEALTH AND SANITATION

Farm families handicapped by sickness and close to poverty are unlikely to be successful. The Farm Security Administration cooperates with various health agencies to combat disease and to improve their physical well-being. Much is accomplished through higher standards of living made possible by better farming under the FSA program. More home-produced fruits, vegetables, meat, milk, butter, eggs and other nourishing food helps. An increased number of pressure cookers, better stoves, improved facilities for handling foodstuffs, more screening, safer water

supply and sanitary privies are important factors.

In Alabama a total of 10,566 pit privies had been constructed on farms occupied by rehabilitation families up to June 30, 1939. Families with pressure cookers number 12,506. Protective screens and good water were provided on 837 farms. Various improvements in the home and furnishings have been made possible. Whereas a large number of families had previously cooked their meals over hearth fires, as in centuries past, it was estimated 71 per cent of them had adequate cook stoves at the end of 1938. Fifty-one per cent had adequate sleeping facilities and families coming on the program at the first of the year showed a 13 per cent improvement in this respect during the year.

HELP IN EMERGENCIES

When floods, drought, sickness, accidents or other emergencies render the situation of needy families still more acute, temporary assistance in the form of grants is given by the FSA until those stricken are able to carry on normally. Some of these grants are made where conditions are such standard farm loans could not be developed to provide necessary food, clothing and medical attention. Help of this type was rendered, for example, during and following the disastrous flood that caused extensive damage in central and southern Alabama in the summer of 1939.

MEDICAL CARE

The progress of a family toward rehabilitation is largely governed by its health. In Alabama, where the state medical association has approved the plan, medical service associations have been formed to assure adequate medical treatment. Nine per cent of rehabilitation families in the state had this protection in 1938, with medical societies endorsing and cooperating in counties where such associations were formed. The average cost per year per family ranges from \$12 to \$18. This fixed sum is written into the farm and home management plan of each borrower.

ADJUSTING FARM DEBTS

Debt-burdened farmers, who are handicapped in making a new start, may secure help from local farm debt adjustment committees that have the assistance of trained farm debt adjustment representatives of the Farm Security Administration. Efforts are directed toward enabling debtor and creditor to reach a mutually satisfactory agreement. In Alabama creditors had reached voluntary agreements under this plan with 4,742 families living on farms totalling 429,416 acres up to July 31, 1939. Their debts, formerly amounting to \$4,037,719, were adjusted downward to \$3,088,198. Through this means farmers are often saved from foreclosure and creditors get substantial payments on what might otherwise be bad debts.

This service is available to all farmers and their creditors, regardless of whether they are FSA borrowers.

COMMUNITY AND COOPERATIVE SERVICES

Progress had been made in utilizing community and cooperative services as a factor in the rural rehabilitation program. Emphasis has been placed on providing facilities and services that cannot be justified economically on the basis of individual use only. An increasing need for improved livestock, harvesting machinery and other farming equipment has developed due to the change in many sections from the one-crop system to diversified farming.

In Alabama a total of \$190,837.13 had been loaned in the period from July, 1936 to October 1, 1939, so that groups of families in the same neighborhood might have needed facilities. This amount included 248 loans, which provided 215 services. The number of participating farmers served was 2,557.

TENANTS BECOME OWNERS

Enactment by Congress of the Bankhead-Jones Farm Tenant Act, which is administered by the Farm Security Administration, is making it possible for worthy tenants and sharecroppers to become farm owners. Permanent self-support for low-income families is the goal of the rehabilitation program and under the tenant-purchase provisions many "graduates" from that group are given the opportunity to achieve security through ownership of a family-size farm. A liberal loan policy is the basis of the tenant-purchase program. The loans are repayable over a period of 40 years and bear interest at the rate of 3 per cent.

Fifty-seven counties of Alabama have been selected for tenant-purchase loans, the selection being made on the basis of farm population, prevalence of tenancy, good land at reasonable prices, and other factors. Before loans are made a committee of three farmers in each county, who are familiar with land values and people, pass on both the farmers to receive loans and the farms to be purchased. Their assistance has facilitated selection of worthy and able applicants and farms productive enough to provide a satisfactory living and repay the loan, enable the borrowers to pay taxes and insurance and keep up the property. The annual payments, including insurance and interest, generally average less than rent formerly paid for the same or similar farms with inferior improvements.

Due to limited funds--\$25,000,000 was available for the country as a whole during the fiscal year ended June 30, 1939, and \$40,000,000 was appropriated for the succeeding fiscal year--only a small percentage of those desiring such loans may obtain them. Applications received in this State up to September 1, 1939, totalled 28,000 but of this number only 541 were established on farms of their own in the two years prior to June

30, 1939. About 557 are expected to get loans during the 1939-40 fiscal year.

The average tenant-purchase loan in Alabama for the first two years was \$4,017. The average farm size was 115 acres. Improvements--including many new houses, barns, fencing, terracing and such other facilities necessary for a well-balanced farm unit--are provided in each loan. During the first year of the program in Alabama 25 per cent of the loans went for improvements and the second year it rose to 34 per cent, due to the necessity of erecting more new buildings as the scarcity of suitable farms with adequate construction became evident.

Alabama counties in which the tenant-purchase program is now under way are: Autauga, Barbour, Blount, Butler, Bullock, Calhoun, Chilton, Chambers, Conecuh, Cherokee, Dallas, Choctaw, De Kalb, Clarke, Clay, Elmore, Cleburne, Geneva, Greene, Colbert, Covington, Crenshaw, Hale, Lawrence, Cullman, Lee, Madison, Dale, Marengo, Escambia, Marion, Fayette, Etowah, Monroe, Montgomery, Franklin, Morgan, Henry, Pickens, Houston, Pike, Lamar, Talladega, Lauderdale, Tallapoosa, Limestone, Walker, Lowndes, Wilcox, Macon, Marshall, Perry, Randolph, Russell, Shelby, Sumter, Tuscaloosa.

RESETTLING STRANDED FARMERS

The Resettlement Division of the Farm Security Administration has established rural projects in Alabama to meet the needs of low-income families and to give them a start toward independence. Under this program large tracts of good land are purchased, subdivided into individual units, buildings constructed and other necessary improvements made. Rentals are collected at first, but applicants are accepted with the expectation they will become purchasers of the units they occupy.

Technical guidance is provided for project families, as with those in rehabilitation and tenant-purchase classifications. The rural community projects offer farm families, many of whom had been drifting into destitution by cultivating submarginal land incapable of adequate production, an opportunity to plan long-range improvements. Further, being in a community with other project farmers, the efficiency of individual farm operations is increased through cooperative action by an entire neighborhood. These small farmers, by banding together, are able to secure tractors, other heavy machinery, purebred sires and additional facilities they could not afford as individuals.

Farm-community and subsistence-homestead projects are located in Alabama. The latter, including Bankhead Farms near Jasper; and Cahaba, Palmyra, Greenwood, and Mount Olive homesteads on the outskirts of Birmingham, embrace a total of 647 units, made up of families whose security is increased by supplemental income derived from garden plots, poultry, hogs and other sources. Farm-community projects are Skyline Farms, near Scottsboro, with 181 units; Coffee County Homesteads, in Coffee County, 320 units; and two projects for negro families, Prairie Farms, in Macon



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